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Postal head ignored CIA snooping

WASHINGTON [UPI]—Former Postmaster General J. Edward Day said Wednesday he rejected CIA attempts to brief him on its illegal mail opening operation by saying: "Do I have to know about it?"

Day and two other former postmasters general testified at Senate Intelligence Committee hearings into the spy agency's 20-year secret surveillance of mail between American citizens and correspondents in Communist nations. Former CIA Director Richard Helms was scheduled to testify later.

Winton Blount, postmaster general from 1969 to 1971, said the CIA led him to believe it was merely recording the outsides of the envelopes and that then Atty. Gen. John Mitchell approved the operation. On that basis, Blount said, he decided there was "no problem as regards the legality" of the program.

John Gronouski, postmaster general from 1963 to 1965, said he never knew about the CIA mail operation and would have opposed it if he had.

BUT DAY, who ran the postal service from 1961 to 1963, said he considered the CIA outside his control and turned a blind eye to its activities.

He disputed a CIA memorandum dated Feb. 16, 1961, which said he had been informed of the mail opening project at a briefing with Allen Dulles, then the CIA director, and two of Dulles' deputies.

"I'm sure from my recollection I wasn't told anything," Day said.

"Dulles said he wanted to tell me

something very secret. I asked, 'Do I have to know about it?' He said, 'No.'

"I figured the CIA has its own line of authority, and I had absolutely no more control over them than the Air Force."

The intelligence committee says it has evidence the agency watched mail between Americans and overseas correspondents—chiefly in Soviet bloc nations—for about 20 years until 1973, in violation of postal regulations, and even though some intelligence analysts considered the operation risky and a waste of time.